



NAIOP Arizona's events can draw a crowd. About 750 people attended the group's signature Night at the Fights event in 2015.

However, commercial success was an effort of dozens of chairmen, formerly referred to as presidents. In fact, one former chairman joked that all you had to do was miss the wrong meeting to be "awarded" the role. Now, the list of chairmen, even from the early days, are accomplished and recognized industry-wide for success.

"It's the preeminent national real estate development organization and I believe then and now that I needed to be involved in the organization," says John Strittmatter, chairman of Ryan Companies US, Inc., who

joined NAIOP-AZ in 1994, when Ryan Companies opened an office in Arizona. "I got more involved as this office became more active."

John DiVall, senior vice president and city manager of Liberty Property Trust's Arizona region, came from the Midwest to start business in a new region for the company.

"Nobody knew me or my company. As much as I put into (NAIOP), it came nowhere near what I got out of it. I encourage people to get involved in our industry. As willing as you are to get involved, the more you get out of it. It helped me get integrated into the real estate community here."

With a continuing goal of expanding membership, the chapter imported

events like Night at the Fights, borrowed from a successful Orange County chapter. The chapter was on a mission for a signature event that could raise resources for the group. Now, it has multiple signature events.

"The goal wasn't to make a lot of money, but to make a lot of friends," Bob Mulhern says about the group's first golf tournament, held at The Raven. "Over the next five years, we became the organization that offered bigger relationship-building events."

David Krumwiede was talked into joining by his then-employer and former NAIOP President Tom Roberts in 1986.

When he eventually became president, akin to what's now the role

of chairman, Phoenix was coming out of the savings and loan crisis and considered an up-and-coming market. It was time, Krumwiede says, for signature events. At the time, NAIOP had 40 members. Even Krumwiede's secretary doubled as the organization's admin during his presidency.

"We didn't have a big budget, so we rolled the dice by throwing a big, signature event," he recalls. That event was the first Night at the Fights.

The event was held at the Ritz and drew a crowd of 250 people. Many of which, Krumwiede says with some amusement, didn't even know what to expect or had ever seen live boxing. At the 2015 Night at the Fights, the event capped out at 750 attendees.

"It was such a big event, if it didn't go well, we weren't going to be a chapter anymore," Mulhern says.

"Some of us weren't sure if it would be successful," Strittmatter admits. "I was sort of on the fence about it and (Dave) Krumwiede always kids me on this ... If you look at who is in the organization and who is in the events, it's people I deal with daily. It's an opportunity for me to create and find resources for Ryan (Companies) to use."

Events like Night at the Fights, that helped bring NAIOP-AZ into the black paved the way for a stronger legislative presence due to its ability to donate to

"I've been here a long time. The chapter has done a great job. From my perspective, I know the chapter back in the early '90s was struggling and there was competition and soul searching in what direction the chapter wanted to take. By the mid to late '90s, the chapter had grown exponentially and positioned itself as the go-to group for legislative issues for CRE in Arizona. We've been fortunate for some great leaders in those chapters. Those things don't happen by accident."

- NAIOP CEO Thomas Bisacchino

PACs and lobby at the Legislature.

The chapter has a legacy of bringing in more than just figurehead presidents, Mulhern says.

"It's like any business. It's being seen a lot of places, doing a lot of stuff, volunteering. You become friends with all these people," says Bolton. "When you call, they know who you are. Is there one person, is there one event? Nah."

Bolton also brought one more important thing to the table — a recommendation for Tim Lawless.

Lawless has been the CEO for nearly 10 years.

"They really go in there and pour a lot of time and energy into it," Mulhern says. "It just amazes me how much each person adds."

The networking events are a gateway to NAIOP-AZ's role as an advocate for commercial development.

When Craig Coppola was chairman of NAIOP, Arizona's commercial real estate taxes were among the top five most expensive in the nation.

"We were at a distinct competitive disadvantage competing for new company relocations," Coppola says. "Additionally, the entire commercial real estate industry was disjointed, with each segment looking out for its own specific interests. NAIOP was the group that could organize, coordinate, and advocate for commercial real estate. At the time, this was our sole focus because it had so much impact on the future."

Bolton recalls, in 2000, "the biggest, largest, most dreadful attack on commercial real estate in Arizona" was initiated by the Sierra Club. The group was attempting to put a development restriction ring around every municipality that had 2,500 or more citizens, akin to Portland.

"That was a huge referendum that NAIOP, along with many others, were able to get the real information out to the market, to the citizens and they voted no," Bolton says. "That was the legacy ... (Arizona was the) only state in the country trying this. We beat them so handily, they dropped it in other places."

Bolton was also the member who brought Lawless to NAIOP, whose main focus has been property tax reform.

"Our voice has adopted a consistent, focused, and reasoned approach to help make Arizona competitive in taxation and meaningful job creation," Coppola says. "We have had some major wins for our industry, but those wins have really helped Arizona's economy grow markedly. Within the organization, the average member knows that our collective efforts matter and are encouraged to be thoughtful business citizens. I think this results in a more effective and productive trade organization."

The ring at the XIX Night of the Fights.

